

CITY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
COUNCIL POLICY

CURRENT

SUBJECT: PLANNING FOR MANAGEMENT OF SEWER FACILITIES LOCATED IN
CANYONS AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS
POLICY NO.: 400-13
EFFECTIVE DATE: January 22, 2002

BACKGROUND:

Historically, the City's sewer lines were constructed in canyons in certain areas of the City to take advantage of gravity flow. Of the 2,850 miles of sewer lines in the city, approximately 320 miles are currently situated in the City's canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands. Many sewers in canyons are currently inaccessible, making regular inspection, maintenance, and cleaning difficult. To effectively maintain the existing sewer lines, the Metropolitan Wastewater Department (MWWD) must gain access to the sewer mains located in the canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands, many of which contain highly sensitive ecosystems.

In February 2000, the Natural Resources and Culture Committee (NR&C) of the San Diego City Council organized a City-Wide Task Force to assist the City in developing a city wide policy(s) for operating, maintaining, and accessing a sewer collection system where environmental health and public safety are protected and impacts to San Diego's urban canyons are eliminated or minimized. A 33-member City-Wide Canyon Sewer Maintenance Task Force was formed, including representation from the City of San Diego, other governmental agencies, environmental organizations, and community groups throughout the City. On March 28, 2001, the City-Wide Canyon Sewer Maintenance Task Force gave their final report and presentation expressing their proposed policies.

This Policy incorporates many of the Task Force's recommendations regarding how to operate, maintain, and access a sewer collection system that is located within canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands when relocation is not economically practical as defined by Policy 400-14, titled Planning for Redirection of Sewage Discharge away from Canyons and Other Environmentally Sensitive Lands.

PURPOSE:

To establish policies and guidelines for safe and effective access, maintenance, and repair of sewer infrastructure located in canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands, while minimizing impacts to sensitive resources. Any subsequent actions taken pursuant to this Policy will be subject to environmental review.

DEFINITIONS:

Emergency Action: An action taken to repair an active or imminent sewage spill.

Urgent Action: An action taken to repair sewer infrastructure that has deteriorated to the point that a break or backup is deemed likely in the near future.

Sewer Access Road: A graded, cleared or paved sewer access route.

Sewer Access Way: A pre-determined or preferred route to follow for access into a canyon or other environmentally sensitive lands.

GENERAL POLICY:

Wherever economically practical as defined by Policy 400-14, titled Planning for Redirection of Sewage Discharge away from Canyons and Other Environmentally Sensitive Lands, sewer infrastructure should be relocated out of canyons or other environmentally sensitive lands. When sewer infrastructure cannot be or has not yet been relocated, the City shall minimize the construction of new sewer access roads. All other access and maintenance practices and procedures undertaken in canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands shall avoid or minimize impacts to sensitive resources. For those impacts that cannot be avoided, the City should execute timely and complete environmental restoration.

Impacts to canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands shall be minimized or avoided by implementing the following:

- Developing plans for appropriate emergency and scheduled access into canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands;
- Replacing deteriorated sewer infrastructure;
- Employing low environmental impact practices and procedures for all sewer repairs, replacement or routine maintenance;
- Expanding the City's equipment fleet to include low impact, canyon proficient vehicles that can safely access natural areas, while minimizing impacts to sensitive resources;
- Stabilizing erosion that could threaten the integrity of existing sewer infrastructure, water quality and habitat value;
- Implementing timely and effective restoration procedures when impacts do occur;
- Establishing and enforcing high performance standards for contractors and City crews;
- Implementing measures that minimize the need for unscheduled maintenance due to erosion, storm runoff, vandalism, and other factors, such as general deterioration of habitat due to sewer operations in canyons; and
- Developing a public outreach plan.

Any specific action or course of action taken in accordance with this Policy will be subject to environmental review.

ACCESS:

Sewer access roads into canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands for purposes of repairing, replacing or maintaining sewer infrastructure shall be avoided whenever possible. Where sewer access paths or roads are necessary for equipment access, they shall be of minimal surface area, require minimal modification to terrain and vegetation, and shall minimize erosion. Surfaces to be considered shall include temporary surfacing materials, permeable surfaces or surfaces that support growing vegetation.

Maintenance Access:

For each canyon or environmentally sensitive land supporting sewer infrastructure, the City shall develop and maintain a Maintenance Access Plan identifying service practices and procedures that minimize environmental damage and community impacts and ensure worker safety.

Emergency Access:

The City shall develop an Emergency Access Policy establishing specialized emergency response teams using specific emergency access plans developed for each canyon supporting sewer infrastructure. This Emergency Access Policy will identify practices and procedures to minimize environmental damage and community impacts, increase worker safety, reduce response times, and provide guidance and confidence to the emergency response teams in making onsite decisions.

SEWER MAIN REPLACEMENT:

Deteriorated sewer mains are a source of sewer spills that pollute San Diego's waterways; therefore, it is the policy of the City to give priority to the repair, replacement or relocation of deteriorated sewer infrastructure.

EMPLOYING LOW ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES FOR SEWER REPAIRS, REPLACEMENT, AND ROUTINE MAINTENANCE:

All repair, replacement, and maintenance of sewer infrastructure located within canyons or other environmentally sensitive lands shall be conducted in a manner that demonstrates the City's commitment to preserving sensitive natural and cultural resources.

EQUIPMENT:

It is recognized that a fleet of canyon proficient vehicles is necessary to service the different types of terrain and specific sewer maintenance and emergency needs of the various canyons environmentally sensitive lands. The City should evaluate and acquire vehicles and cleaning equipment, both for routine maintenance and emergency repair, that will safely and effectively access, maintain and clean sewers in canyons, and will minimize impact to the canyon's natural and residential environment. While cost and expediency are factors, they shall not be the overriding factor in the selection of equipment and cleaning

techniques for canyons.

EROSION CONTROL AND RESTORATION:

The hydrological function, habitat, and terrain of canyons impacted by sewer-related activities shall be restored to the maximum extent feasible to their preconstruction or natural condition.

PERFORMANCE:

Performance standards and specifications for work conducted in canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands shall be developed to ensure the protection of sensitive resources.

MINIMIZE THE NEED FOR UNSCHEDULED MAINTENANCE:

To reduce the potential for sewage spills and the need for unscheduled maintenance, steps shall be taken to minimize damage to or blockage of sewer infrastructure resulting from exterior factors such as erosion and vandalism.

Canyons and other environmentally sensitive lands that contain sewer infrastructure shall be regularly monitored for erosion problems, downstream sedimentation, invasive species, inappropriate human intrusion, and roots. If these or other situations could result in damage to sewer infrastructure, they should be corrected in a timely manner.

PUBLIC OUTREACH:

A Public Outreach Plan shall be developed and implemented that will keep community groups, adjoining property owners, and other stakeholders informed of repair, mitigation, and restoration activities occurring within an adjoining canyon or other environmentally sensitive area.

HISTORY:

Adopted as R-295976 01/22/2002